

Message Text

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CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CE, MV
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

REF: (A) STATE 163256, (B) COLOMBO 3447 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: ON JULY 28 THE VOTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
MALDIVES (GOM) WENT TO THE POLLS TO DECIDE WHETHER MR.
MAUMOOM ABDUL GAYOOM WILL BE THEIR NEXT PRESIDENT.

HAVING MET THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS AND BEEN ELECTED
BY THE CITIZENS MAJLIS (PARLIAMENT) TO HEAD THE TEN-YEAR
OLD REPUBLIC OF OVER 2000 ISLANDS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS,
MR. GAYOOM IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE THE OATH OF THE OFFICE OF
PRESIDENT ON NOVEMBER 11, AFTER A FINAL VOTE COUNT IS RE-
CORDED AUGUST 8. LONGTIME SUPPORTERS OF CURRENT PRESIDENT
IBRAHIM NASIR ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GAYOOM'S YOUTH, AND
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ABOUT HIS MANY YEARS SPENT ABROAD. SOME WORRY ABOUT
HIS DEEP DEDICATION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM. STILL
OTHERS SEE THESE AS ATTRIBUTES WHICH ADD TO GAYOOM'S
SUITABILITY TO LEAD THE COUNTRY AT THIS TIME WHEN ITS
INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENTAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS ARE
RAPIDLY EXPANDING. THE CHANGES WHICH THE MALDIVES
ARE EXPERIENCING AND SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WITH WHICH

THE NEXT PRESIDENT MUST GRAPPLE, WERE DISCERNIBLE DURING VISIT BY LABOR OFFICER ACCOMPANIED BY NEW CONSULAR AGENT TO OBSERVE POLLING PLACES ON THREE SEPARATE ISLANDS.

END SUMMARY.

2. REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES ADMINISTRATION

A REPUBLIC SINCE 1968, THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES IS EXPERIENCING ITS THIRD PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THERE ARE 64,000 ELIGIBLE VOTERS AMONG THE APPROXIMATELY 153,000 POPULATION.

STATE ADMINISTRATION IS CONDUCTED BY THE PRESIDENT; A MINISTERS' MAJLIS (CABINET) APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT; AND THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS (PARLIAMENT) WHICH IS ELECTED BY POPULAR VOTE. AS SUPREME HEAD OF STATE, THE PRESIDENT HAS THE POWER TO RATIFY ALL BILLS PASSED BY THE MAJLIS AND SUBMIT BILLS ORIGINATED BY HIS OFFICE TO THEM. HE HAS NO VETO POWERS AS SUCH. HOWEVER, HIS DECISION ON A BILL CAN ONLY BE OVER-RULED BY A TWO-THIRDS VOTE OF THE COMBINED MINISTERS' AND CITIZENS' MAJLIS, INTER ALIA, THE PRESIDENT HAS THE AUTHORITY TO GRANT PARDONS AND AMNESTY, PROCLAIM TEMPORARY ORDERS IN AN EMERGENCY, AS LONG AS THEY DO NOT CONTRAVENE THE GOM CONSTITUTION; TO CONFER TITLES AND MEDALS OF STATE; AND, SINCE THERE IS NO ELECTED VICE PRESIDENT TO THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MALDIVES, THE PRESIDENT HAS THE RIGHT TO APPOINT ONE OR MORE VICE PRESIDENTS AS HE DEEMS NECESSARY.

3. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENT

THE MALDIVIAN CONSTITUTION SETS FORTH REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENT AS FOLLOWS:

HE-

- A) SHALL BE A MUSLIM OF SUNNI SECT.
- B) SHALL BE A CITIZEN OF MALDIVES BORN OF MALDIVIAN PARENTS.
- C) SHALL BE MALE, AT LEAST 30 YEARS OF AGE, AND
- D) IN COMPLETE CONTROL OF HIS FACULTIES AND CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING THE DUTIES OF HEAD OF STATE.

4. THE NEXT PRESIDENT

THE CANDIDATE IN THIS ELECTION, MR. MAUMON ABDUL GAYOOM, 41-YEAR OLD MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, IS EXPECTED TO BE ELECTED (REFTEL A). SEVERAL FACTORS IN GAYOOM'S BACKGROUND ARE TOPICS OF CONCERN BY DIFFERENT FACTIONS OF THE MALDIVES POPULANCE. SOME VIEW THE EXTENSIVE

PERIODS HE HAS SPENT OUTSIDE THE MALDIVES, AND HIS INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AS EXACTLY WHAT THE YOUNG REPUBLIC NEEDS AT THIS TIME WHEN IT IS EXPANDING ITS INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WISH THAT THE MALDIVES COULD RETURN TO THE DAYS WHEN ITS ONLY REAL TRADING PARTNER WAS SRI LANKA, AND ARE AFRAID THAT GAYOOM WILL OPEN THE COUNTRY UP TO FOREIGN EXPLOITATION. GAYOOM'S DEEP INTEREST AND EXTENSIVE STUDY IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGION IS ALSO A MATTER OF CONCERN FOR SOME. KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES SAY HOWEVER THAT THOUGH HE IS AN EXPERT ON ISLAM, HE IS NOT ORTHODOX IN HIS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES, AND MAY MAKE THE MALDIVES GOVERNMENT EVEN MORE SECULAR THEN HAS BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE CASE UNDER HIS PREDECESSOR, PRESIDENT NASIR.

5. PRESIDENT NASIR'S FUTURE ROLE

A BILL RECENTLY PASSED IN THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS CALLS FOR THE PRESIDENT NASIR TO RECEIVE FULL PAY AND PRESIDENTIAL PRIVILEGES FOR THE REMAINDER OF HIS LIFE. THE BILL ALSO SPECIFIES THAT PRESIDENT NASIR WILL REMAIN PERMANENTLY AS AN ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC. THIS IS A REFLECTION OF THE RELUCTANCE OF MANY MAJLIS MEMBERS TO RESIGN THEMSELVES TO THE FACT THAT NASIR, WHO HAS VIRTUALLY RULED THE COUNTRY FOR THE PAST 21 YEARS AS PRESIDENT, 11 PRIOR TO THAT AS PRIME MINISTER, WILL NO LONGER HEAD THE TINY REPUBLIC.

6. ELECTION PROCEDURE

AMERICANS ARE CONDITIONED TO SUSPECT AN ELECTION WHERE THERE IS ONLY ONE PARTY PARTICIPATING OR WHERE THERE IS ONLY ONE CANDIDATE ON THE BALLOT. THE ELECTION PROCEDURE IN THE MALDIVES IS UNUSUAL IN THAT THERE ARE NO POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE COUNTRY AND THE CONSTITUTION CALLS FOR ONLY ONE CANDIDATE'S NAME TO APPEAR ON THE BALLOT. THE PROCEDURE IS SIMPLE AND UNIQUE; IT IS ALSO QUITE DEMOCRATIC.

FIRST, THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS BY SECRET BALLOT DECIDES ON A CANDIDATE. AFTER OBTAINING THE CONSENT OF THE CANDIDATE IN WRITING, THE MAJLIS PROPOSES HIS NAME TO THE PUBLIC FOR ELECTION BY REFERENDUM, WHICH WAS HELD THIS PAST JULY 28TH. EACH ELIGIBLE VOTER THEN CASTS HIS VOTE FOR OR AGAINST THE CANDIDATE. THE CANDIDATE RECEIVES A MAJORITY OF THE VOTES CAST AND HE BECOMES PRESIDENT. IF HE FAILS TO SECURE A MAJORITY, THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS MUST RECONSIDER AND PROPOSE ANOTHER CANDIDATE IN ACCORDANCE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH THE PROCEDURE OUTLINED ABOVE.

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7. ELECTION DAY ATMOSPHERE

AS STATED IN COLOMBO 3447 THE LABOR OFFICER WITH OUR CONSULAR AGENT, MISS RASHEEDA MOHAMED DIDI INTERPRETING, OBSERVED THE VOTING IN THE JULY 28 REFERENDUM AT MALE, AND AT THE ISLAND OF HIMAFUSHII IN SOUTHERN MALE ATOLL, AND AT MAHIBADOO, THE CHIEF ISLAND OF ARI ATOLL LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 50 MILES SOUTHWEST OF MALE (SIX HOURS BY MOTOR LAUNCH).

THE SCENES AT THE VOTING PLACES VISITED REFLECT BASIC DIFFERENCES IN LIFE STYLES BETWEEN THEIR RESPECTIVE LOCALES. THEY ALSO EXHIBIT THE CONTRASTS BROUGHT ON BY RAPID CHANGE, WHICH THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO CONFRONT.

IN THE CAPITAL IN MALE THERE WERE ORDERLY QUEUES, MALES ON

THE RIGHT AND FEMALES ON THE LEFT WAITING PATIENTLY TO ENTER
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AN ATTRACTIVE VOTING BOOTH AND CAST THEIR VOTES FOR OR
AGAINST THE CITIZENS' MAJLIS CHOICE TO BE PRESIDNT FOR THE
NEXT FIVE YEARS. THE BOOTHS WERE ERECTED IN VARIOUS PARTS
OF THE CITY OF SERVE MALE'S 16,000 VOTERS DURING THE OFFICIAL
POLLING HOURS OF 7:30 A.M. AND 5:00 P.M. HOWEVER, SOME
BOOTHS REMAINED OPEN UNTIL AFTER MIDNIGHT IN ORDER TO FACILI-
TATE VOTING FOR AS MANY PERSONS AS POSSIBLE. TWO SMARTLY
DRESSED POLICEMEN STOOD AT THE HEAD OF EACH LINE AND ALONG-
SIDE THE BALLOT BOX TO SEE THAT THE BALLOTING PROCEEDED
SMOOTHLY. VOTING OFFICERS SURROUNDED THE TABLE ON WHICH
THE BALLOT BOX RESTED, AND REGISTERED AND INSTRUCTED VOTERS
AS THEY APPROACHED THE TABLE. POLICE SERGEANTS ON MOTOR-
CYCLES PASSED THE BOOTHS EVERY 2 TO 3 MINUTES AND A
PATROL WAGON (DATSON MINI VAN) CARRYING SIX POLICE
CONSTABLES EVERY 5 MINUTES OR SO. VOTING PROCEEDED
LIKE CLOCKWORK.

8. VOTING HIMAFUSHII

AT HIMAFUSHII, ONLY 40 MINUTES BY MOTOR LAUNCH FROM
MALE, THE VOTING WAS MORE RELAXED AND INFORMAL. UNTIL
TWO YEARS AGO HIMAFUSHII WAS A SLEEPY LITTLE FISHING
VILLAGE. TODAY, OVER 75 PERCENT OF ITS INHABITANTS
HAVE TAKEN TO CREATION OF HANDICRAFTS TO SELL TO THE
INCREASING NUMBERS OF EUROPEAN TOURISTS WHO VISIT THE
MALDIVES EACH YEAR.

THE SINGLE POLLING PLACE AT HIMAFUSHII WAS THE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL HOUSE. THE PHYSICAL SET-UP SLIGHTLY
RESEMBLED THAT OF MALE, IN THAT THERE WAS A TABLE WHERE
THE ELECTION OFFICIALS REGISTERED AND INSTRUCTED THE
VOTERS AND THE BALLOT BOX WAS GUARDED BY A VILLAGE ELECTION
OFFICIAL AND AN ASSISTANT. HOWEVER, THERE WERE NO LINES
OF PEOPLE WAITING TO VOTE. VOTING ORDER WAS BY HOUSE
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NUMBER. AFTER ALL THE VILLAGE MEN HAD VOTED, THE
VILLAGE FEMALES WERE ALLOWED THEIR TURN. UNLIKE IN MALE
WHERE VOTERS WERE SMARTLY DRESSED (WESTERN STYLES) AND
APPEARED TO BE TURNING OUT FOR SPECIAL EVENT, THE LESS
SOPHISTICATED VOTERS OF HIMAFUSHII WERE DRESSED IN
SARONGS, SOME NUDE ABOVE THE WAIST. MANY GAVE THE
IMPRESSION THAT THEY WERE VOTING ONLY BECAUSE THEY
HAD BEEN TOLD IT WAS THEIR DUTY TO DO SO. OUR

CONSULAR AGENT ASKED THE VILLAGE CHIEF IN DHIVEHI, THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE MALDIVES, IF VOTING WAS COMPULSORY. HE REPLIED THAT IT WAS INDEED COMPULSORY, AND THAT ALL OF THE 540 ELIGIBLE VOTERS WILL HAVE VOTED BY NOON, AS INSTRUCTED BY HIM. THE VILLAGE CHIEF ALSO INFORMED US THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH REGULATIONS, HE AND SENIOR ELECTION OFFICIALS WOULD SET OUT BY BOAT FOR MALE WITH THE SEALED BALLOT BOX AT EXACTLY 5:30 P.M. THEY WOULD REMAIN WITH THE BOX UNTIL ALL OF THE BALLOTS IT CONTAINED HAD BEEN COUNTED IN MALE. THEIR DUTIES WOULD END ONCE THEY HAD OBSERVED THE COUNTING AND TALLYING OF THEIR VILLAGE VOTES, BUT NOT BEFORE.

9. VOTING AT MAHIBADOO ISLAND

AS COULD BE EXPECTED, VOTING PROCEDURES AT MAHABADOO SITE OF THE ARI ATOLL CHIEF'S OFFICE WERE EVEN LESS FORMAL THAN THAT AT HIMAFUSHII YET CLEARLY COMPLIED WITH THE PHYSICAL AND SECURITY PROCEDURES OUTLINED ABOVE. HERE THE ELECTION WAS SUPERVISED BY THE ATOLL CHIEF. ATOLL CHIEFS ARE SENIOR EMPLOYEES OF THE MINISTRY OF PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS AND AS SUCH OFTEN COME FROM MALE. THEY ARE GENERALLY BETTER EDUCATED AND INFORMED ABOUT VOTING AND OTHER PROCEDURES THAN THEIR SUBORDINATES, THE ISLAND (OR VILLAGE) CHIEFS.

MAHIBADOO IS ALSO EXPERIENCING RAPID AND DRASTIC CHANGES. ALTHOUGH STILL A FISHING COMMUNITY, CENTURIES OLD METHODS OF DRYING AND MARKETING (BARTERING) FISH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN REPLACED. A REFRIGERATION PLANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FORSTORING RAW FISH UNTIL IT IS TAKEN AWAY BY LARGE THAI REFRIGERATED VESSELS OPENED JULY 22. THE FIRST OF 18 SUCH PLANTS TO BE CONSTRUCTED BY THE GOM AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE PROMOTERS OF BANGKOK, THE PLANT HAS REVOLUTIONIZED THE INDUSTRY, SUCH AS IT WAS IN MAHIBADOO, AND, THE SAME IS NO DOUBT IN STORE FOR MANY SIMILAR ISLAND VILLAGES.

AN EXAMPLE OF ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES EXISTING BETWEEN HAMIFISHII AND MAHIBADOO WAS SEEN WHEN THE SAME QUESTION REGARDING COMPULSORY VOTING WAS PUT TO THE IMPRESSIVE YOUNG ATOLL CHIEF. HE RESPONDED WITH A CLEAR EXPLANATION OF THE LAW EMPHASIZING THAT VOTING IS NOT COMPULSORY IN THE MALDIVES BUT THAT PEOPLE ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO VOTE. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR VILLAGE CHIEFS TO IMPLY THAT FAILURE TO VOTE COULD RESULT IN LEGAL ACTION BEING TAKEN AGAINST THE "GUILTY". WE UNDERSTOOD THAT NEARLY 70 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS TURNED OUT IN LAST PRESIDENTIAL REFERENDUM SEPTEMBER 21, 1973.

10. THE TRANSITION PERIOD

RECENT TRAVELERS RETURNING TO COLOMBO FROM THE MALDIVES HAVE DESCRIBED TO US THE ACTIVITIES OF NASIR AND GAYOOM AS THEY NOW PREPARE THE COUNTRY FOR ITS NEW LEADERSHIP. AS WITH OTHER ATOLL SOCIETIES ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD, THE MALDIVES IS HIGHLY STRUCTURED WITH EVEN THE MOST HUMBLE INDIVIDUALS KNOWING THEIR ROLES AND FULFILLING THEM WITH DIGNITY. WHEN A CHANGE IN ACTUAL AND SYMBOLIC AUTHORITY OF THE SORT NOW TAKING PLACE OCCURS, A GREAT DEAL OF PERSONAL CONTACT, BOTH OF A PROTOCOL AND SUBSTANTIVE NATURE, IS UNDERTAKEN BY THE LEADERSHIP TO INSURE THAT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FEELS IT HAS BEEN CONSULTED, AND IS THEREFORE OBLIGED TO ACCEPT THE OUTCOME.

11. IN ADDITION TO THE PEOPLES' MAJLIS HAVING AFFORDED NASIR THE PRESTIGE OF OFFICIAL RECOGNITION AS ADVISOR, WHICH WILL SERVE TO ASSUAGE THE OLD GUARD, POLITICIANS WHO WERE AT ODDS WITH NASIR ARE ALSO BEING BROUGHT BACK INTO THE FOLD AT LEAST SYMBOLICALLY. FOR EXAMPLE, ALI MANIKU,WHO HAS BEEN EXILED IN SINGAPORE IN THE RESPONSIBLE JOB AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MALDIVIAN SHIPPING CORPORATION IS REPORTEDLY BACK IN MALE.FORMER PRIME MINISTER AHMED ZAKE,WHO HAS BEEN RUSTICATING ON AN ATOLL FOR INCURRING NASIR'S DISPLEASURE HAS ALSO BEEN SEEN IN MALE, SUGGESTING THAT ALL CONCERNED SEE THE NEED FOR PULLING THE SOCIETY TOGETHER TO HELP GAYOOM FACE THE FUTURE.

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12. FOREIGN INFLUENCE

MALDIVIANS ARE TRADITIONALLY SUSPICIOUS THOUGH NOT PERSONALLY FEARFUL OF FOREIGNERS AND ARE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFERIORITY. THEIR HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS WITH INDIANS, PORTUGUESE, DUTCH AND BRITISH ARE TRADITIONALLY NOT RECOUNTED IN POSITIVE TERMS. SIMILARLY, THEIR DESCRIPTION OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE BRITISH LEFT GAN ROYAL AIR FORCE BASE, AND THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS TERMINATED FOR THE SAME FACILITIES, ORDINARILY DEPICT THE FOREIGNER AS CRUDE, OVERBEARING AND UNFAIR. NEEDLESS TO SAY, FOREIGN NEGOTIATORS WITH THE MALDIVIANS RIGHT DOWN TO THE CURRENT UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ESTABLISHMENT FIND THEM DILATORY, FINANCIALLY GRASPING, ETC. GIVEN THIS BACKGROUND IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THUS FAR NO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALLEGATIONS HAVE REACHED US OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN THE CURRENT MALDIVIAN POLITICAL PROCEEDINGS.

13. THE NASIR GENERATION OF LEADERS WENT TO THE EQUIVALENT OF HIGH SCHOOL IN SRI LANKA. SUCCESSIVE COLOMBO GOVERNMENTS' NEGLECT OF RELATIONS WITH THE MALDIVES AND OFFHAND TREATMENT OF GOM INTERESTS HAS LED TO STRONG EXPRESSION OF RESENTMENT FROM MALE BY INDIVIDUALS WHOSE WARM MEMORIES OF HOSPITALITY AND ENJOYMENT DURING THEIR COLOMBO SCHOOL DAYS HAD LED THEM TO EXPECT MORE. A FEW SRI LANKANS HAVE COME TO REALIZE THAT, "WE TREAT THE MALDIVIANS ABOUT AS BADLY AS THE INDIANS TREAT US.", BUT THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO AFFECT GSL POLICIES. THE GAYOOM "GENERATION" WAS NOT SCHOOLED IN COLOMBO. THEY COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION IN MALE, AND THEN WENT ABROAD, MANY TO EGYPT AND OTHERS TO PAKISTAN, AUSTRALIA, ETC. THEY ACCEPT THAT THEY ARE CULTURALLY, PHYSICALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY MORE CLOSELY

RELATED TO SRI LANKA THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY BUT HAVE NO PERSONAL TIES OR EMOTIONAL HANG-UPS ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP, AND IT HAS NEVER BEEN CITED AS AN ELEMENT IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY.

14. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT GROUP OF FOREIGNERS IN THE MALDIVES ARE INDIAN TRADERS IN MALE. THEY ARE MORE HIGHLY CAPITALIZED, MORE EXPERIENCED AND PROBABLY MORE ENERGETIC THAN THEIR MALDIVIAN COUNTERPARTS AND WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE MALDIVIAN TRADING COMMUNITY IS PRESSURING THE POLITICIANS TO PUSH THEM OUT OR REDUCE THEIR SCOPE. THIS SUGGESTS THE MORE AMBITIOUS FOREIGN-EDUCATED GAYOOM GENERATION MAY ALSO WISH TO EXPAND ITS OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AS WELL. THERE ARE NO OTHER RESIDENT FOREIGN BUSINESS INTERESTS EXCEPT FOR THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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JAPANESE AND THAI FISHING COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES.

15. POST SCRIPT.AFTER FOREGOING WAS DRAFTED,WE RECEIVED A TELEX FROM OUR CONSULAR AGENT REPORTING THAT "ELECTION RESULTS HAVE BEEN FINALIZED IN FAVOR OF GAYOOM."
WRIGGINS

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